

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with great joy that I stand before you this day to formally begin the capital appeal for our building expansion project. Years of prayer, planning, and hard work. Today we set out down a path which, if God wills it and God blesses our plan, will end with a beautiful new facility to worship our God, teach his Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ, and train people for works of service which will make an impact in families, in our Midtown community and beyond.

The purpose of this building expansion is simple: that we might give glory to God and praise his holy name. Aren't we doing that now? Absolutely! But could we do more? Are we already giving God our very best... or could we give more? Fellow members of Good Shepherd... you have voted in an overwhelming majority that we can do more with a new building. So here we are!

We have a master plan drawn up... you've probably seen it in the narthex. We've begun meeting with the city about getting our plans approved. We are moving forward. But one absolutely key aspect of this project remains open ended at this point: how will we pay for it? Starting today and culminating in a celebration Sunday on November 21st, by God's grace we will answer that question.

During the past couple weeks, all of our church leaders, including your pastor, have been asked to prayerfully consider how they can support this building project. Those pledges will be turned in today. Now the meetings will begin with all of the members of our congregation. In the bulletin you will find a purple insert. On it you can record what time of the week is convenient for such a visit. Then Mr. Loberger or a Building Committee member will be contacting you about a specific date.

I'm excited! God has blessed Good Shepherd spectacularly over its 60+ year history. We've had steady growth over the past few years, and rapid growth in our school recently. But more importantly, God's Word of truth and comfort is being proclaimed to our community and even around the world. To God be the glory!

The Word of God before us today is appropriate as we set off down this exciting path. The reading comes from the last chapter of the book of Hebrews. We'll be looking at selected verses from that chapter. These are the concluding words of encouragement from the author who has already reminded his readers about Christ's perfect sacrifice for all sin.

The overall theme of this section we can take from verse 15: **"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name."**

From the time the Holy Spirit first created faith in your heart, you received amazing gifts. Forgiveness, life salvation... all belong to you because of the Lord Jesus Christ! These are exactly the gifts we need for a truly blessed life now and in eternity. It all comes to us free of charge from our gracious God. But we need to understand something. Although being a Christian has its beginning and foundation in receiving these gifts from God for free, please don't think Christianity is just all about "getting." Having received freely from our God that

which we needed most... and having received it at great cost to him, we must recognize that we now belong to him. Our life belongs to God. The life we live now is no longer lived for ourselves but for him who died for us. **The Christian life we live now is a life of self-denial.** Have you really contemplated that fact? The life God calls you to live as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. The life he calls you to live in response to his free, full, undeserved love, is a life of self-denial. That is, a life where you no longer go around with attitude “What’s in it for me.” But with the attitude: “What’s in it for God!” Every word that comes out of my mouth: “What’s in it for God?” Every minute of my work day: “What’s in it for God?” Every minute of our leisure time: “What’s in it for God?” In our relationships with others... yes, including the most intimate relationship of marriage, we should be asking, “What’s in it for God?” How will I praise him? How will I honor him? How will I glorify him every minute of every day? **“Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise.”** The believer who knows his own sinfulness, and who knows God’s unconditional forgiveness *will* be moved to deny self and live for God.

Let’s back up now to verse 5 of our text: **“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”**

What are the most difficult areas to deny self and live to continuously praise God? I would suggest that if the way we handle our money and possessions is not the most difficult area... it’s certainly in the top three. We naturally think of self, and we quickly and easily spend our money on ourselves. Selfish use of money is something we all struggle with mightily! We spend selfishly because we are not content. We are dissatisfied with what we have and think that getting new and more will make us more happy and secure. In doing so we’re not living for God, we’re living for self.

Honestly look at where your money is going! What have you spent your money on this past week? Can you think back and quickly make a mental note? Did you go out to eat? Where? Buy groceries? How many? What kind? Department store? Movie? Which movie? What did you spend your money on? Who did you spend your money on? If there is any area where our selfishness becomes most evident, it’s in our spending habits. When it comes to your finances, *are you continually offering a sacrifice of praise to God?*

I have heard more than one person say that they are all for our building project, but that they don’t know that they personally will be able to give much toward it. I don’t know how to respond to that, except... honestly ask if yourself if you are **continuously offering a sacrifice of praise to God** in the things your spending money on. Take time today or tomorrow to evaluate every last expense and ask that question. I mean everything: Right down to car payment or expenses and mortgage payment. Are the payments made for these things reflecting your **continuous offering of a sacrifice of praise to God?**

Can I just pause here and clarify something? When I preach from this pulpit, I hope that no one ever presumes that I do so as if I am already doing the things perfectly. Nothing could be further from the truth. If you evaluated *my* expenses from the past week, I suspect you might find an expenditure or two that you could question. Pastor, does this expense truly indicate your sacrifice of praise to God? No. Not always. I need to hear this admonition as much as the next person. You see, it’s God’s Word, and I’m called to proclaim it... even when I sometimes fall short of putting it into practice. The holy expectations of God’s law convict my heart just as much as they convict yours.

Let's continue. Whether we're spending selfishly, or hoarding our money selfishly, there is only one thing that will change our attitude... the promises of God. And here is what he promises: **"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."** So we say with confidence, **"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"** God promises he will take care of you. Much of our use of what God has entrusted to us stems from our doubts and fears. We are actually trusting our money to see us through rough times instead of God. But he promises he will never leave us or forsake us. Never! There is not a recession or even depression that can harm us. God almighty is with us and will take care of us. The one who possesses all power and all things is your helper. If God is for you, what can man do to you? What can a lack of money do to you? Nothing! Be confident in the Lord.

Now someone might be saying, "That's nice, Pastor, but where's your proof? Good theory, but how do I know?" Our text continues: **"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."** You see, God's promises don't exist in a vacuum. He fulfills those promises in the daily lives of believers. Remember the spiritual leaders who have gone before you, and look at the outcome of their way of life. Did God keep his promises to them? Well, he'll keep his promises to you as well.

Look at the examples from the Bible when men and women of faith trusted God in all things. Were they disappointed? Did Paul end his life in despair because his trust in the Lord was in vain? No! Did Stephen, the first man to be put to death for the Christian faith, despair in his final moments that God had left him? No! He died in joy and peace. Picture a man stoned to death with a peaceful smile on his face... that was Stephen.

Think of examples from your life time. Can you think of pastors you've known in the past that are now with the Lord? Pastor Free comes to mind for me... a former pastor here at Good Shepherd. Many of you know him. He served the Lord tirelessly and selflessly. After a fight with leukemia he was taken to be with the Lord 2 ½ years ago. Consider the outcome of his way of life, as the writer to the Hebrews says. A man who gave great glory to the Lord in his life, and relied upon him in all things, and now is resting in eternal glory with God and his holy angels. God kept his promises! And he will keep them to you as well.

Finally, the true reason we are motivated to continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise is found in verses 11-14 of our text: **"The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp."** Let me pause here to explain. Remember context. The writer is writing to whom? The Hebrews. The reference here is a familiar one for them, but maybe not so much for us. It's referring to the great day of atonement. Once per year. Priest sacrifices animal for self and for people. Blood shed. Body burned outside of camp. Sins were removed.

And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

Foreshadowing of Jesus. Perfect sacrifice. Once for all. God makes us holy through his blood.

Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

As followers of Jesus, we now live denying self and living for God. Going outside the camp means that even as we live in this world, we don't live of the world. We're different. We

live in disgrace because we live for Jesus, not for self. And that's weird! Jesus has called us to weird living that is completely different from the way of the world.

For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

The things of this world are not enduring. We live for God... for the city that is to come. We have a different perspective and a different meaning and purpose for life. We aren't living for "me." We're living for God. It's about his glory and his pleasure. Not my glory. Not my pleasure.

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

Your life, now, is one in which you continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise.

What I'd like to ask you to do, then, on this weekend when we kickoff the appeal for our building expansion project, is this: Pray and ask, **“How will supporting this project be a part of my continually offering to God a sacrifice of praise?”** We both know that this isn't by any means the only way you will live and give to the glory of God. I just ask that each of us would prayerfully consider how this fits into our overall life which isn't lived for self, but for God and his praise and glory.

May God bless us as we work together in his eternal Kingdom and for his eternal kingdom!

Amen.